

The Cup of Blessing Offers a Chance to Live Out God's Love

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Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the wine we offer you:
fruit of the vine and work of human hands,
it will become our spiritual drink.
—Excerpt from the Order of Mass, 25

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ on June 23 in our parishes, we are reminded of our focus to become what we receive in the Eucharist. Eating of the Body and drinking of the Blood of Christ brings us into communion with others.

Having participated in the Eucharist, we join Christ in letting humankind know that life is bountiful, that hope is for all, and that love is healing. The Eucharist is a constant reminder that God's fidelity is for all of us, no matter our hungers or thirsts. In the account of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes proclaimed on the Body and Blood of Christ (Luke 9:11b–17), the evangelist makes it apparent that the Eucharist is not scarce. Jesus enters into relationship with the people who have gathered to listen to him. Recognizing their hunger, he feeds the crowd with a few loaves of bread and some fish. As he does this, the disciples gain deeper insight into who Jesus is and what he can accomplish.

THE HOPE WITHIN THE EUCHARIST

As liturgical ministers, we sip from the blessing cup and seek to exemplify the hope we receive in the Eucharist. The celebration of the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ is an opportunity for liturgical ministers to reflect more deeply on the stories of our people, those who have discovered the spiritual drink God offers and who hold in their hands the Real Presence of Jesus Christ. Fidelity to the Eucharist becomes a profound reflection on how and why our ministry leads people to the altar.

The cup of blessing teaches me about God's covenant and about the thirst that people have for love. I focus my reflections here on the wine that we have received from God, the fruit of the vine and the work of human hands. Some years ago while ministering in a small community that served people in poverty, a woman approached me after Mass shaking and weeping. She asked me why on that day we had used a different wine at Mass. I told her the dark, overly sweet red wine had been a donation



Drinking from the cup, communicants accept the risk to take God's love into the world.

and it was nearly finished and we would return to using our regular wine soon. With desperation in her voice, she asked me to never use that wine at Mass again.

The older woman went on to explain that her father drank the same cheap wine every day after work. It was this kind of wine that made him a violent drunk. She said the smell of that wine still haunts her and reminds her of a horrific childhood in which she was sexually and emotionally abused. I will never forget her standing in front of me, trying to use words to reveal

her past and to persuade me never to use that particular wine for Eucharist.

When I hold the chalice filled with wine at Mass, I often remember her. Her story settles more deeply into my soul the more I sip from the cup of salvation. After learning of her trauma, I understand more clearly our human ache for God's covenant of love. I simply cannot imagine all the ways in which people need and long for God.

So I hold on to the chalice for dear life, for it is heavy in my hands. I pray well beyond my safe life as a priest. I pray for all the people who teach me how to need God's redemption and compassion. I pray for all who are allergic to this wine of salvation and for all alcoholics and their families. I pray for all who find more meaning in their lives at the bottom of a wine bottle than in the eyes of their children. I pray for all the children who cringe smelling the breath of a parent.

LOVE WITHIN OTHERS' PAIN

The cup of salvation blends love with sorrow, pain, and broken relationships. We need God more than ever through this covenant of compassion, through the giving of Jesus' Body and his Blood unto death. His suffering is for all the people who tell me that their pain never heals and that their lives will never be the same because of the neglect of a parent, a neighbor, or a friend. As I offer again the cup of wine to become the Real Presence of Christ Jesus, I hold within my heart the stories, the fears, the trembling of the people who search for meaning, for forgiveness, and for God. My heart is full of desire and longing for Christ Jesus and for those who hope for such redemption.

As the years have passed, the gestures, images, and symbols used in the Mass have deepened in my soul. I have learned to be more intentional, kissing the altar and the Book of the Gospels with care and tenderness, consciously holding on to the ambo while proclaiming the Gospel, breathing in the incense as an offering, praying aloud the prayer texts with great concern and hope. I am also more at home at Mass these days because I have journeyed with so many people who starve for such a meal of hope, who wander in deserts of loneliness and despair, and who ache to become someone special in the world. On some days, as I hold up my silver, handcrafted chalice, I carry within me the pain of the world that is often forgotten and pushed aside. I know after all these years that in the cup of salvation at Mass are sediments of love, goodness, and peace, waiting to be consumed by real people. My heart becomes a chalice as well, filled with compassion for those who wait to drink of love.

Mingled in this gift of wine in the chalice is a drop of water, mixing humanity and divinity. This mixture reminds me of water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus as he hung on the cross. This is the mix of God's covenant with us, the source of such presence in his passion, death, and Resurrection. I never take for granted this bit of water. I ache to recognize how the Eucharist is transforming our deeply human lives into the glory of God. My experiences are only a drop in a bucket, but they are enough to understand the desire people have for love, mercy, and tenderness. Within the drop of water is a mix of

humankind who await shelter, daily food, and healthcare. They anticipate their tears being wiped from their eyes and experiencing a new sense of belonging. The drop of water in the wine does not evaporate or become diminished; the water is a symbol that our world awaits transformation and peace, integrity and consolation.

REFLECTING ON THE COVENANT

Jesus reminds us that we must cleanse the inside of the cup, our inner hearts, so that we may learn to be Christlike. We must examine our attitudes, words, and examples so that we may worthily proclaim love, compassion, and healing. It may take a lifetime to allow God's fidelity to transform us so that we leave any bitterness aside. Jesus queried the Apostles, "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" (Matthew 20:22). We are left with this question, too. Drinking in divine love, we take a risk, that we may be changed into love ourselves.

The cup of salvation is the Blood of Christ poured out for God's beloved. Within this daily cup, I better understand the blood on our violent streets. I ache to have this blood washed away from every concrete walkway, from every school wall or mall floor, from every place where violence has landed. The only remedy I know for violence is at the bottom of a chalice.

Within the chalice, I also carry a prayer for people whose illness or suffering is connected with blood. There are the women who suffer miscarriages and the young girl who needs a heart transplant. I hold in my heart also people with diseases of the blood, cancer, and AIDS. In laboratories, where blood awaits testing, precautions are taken. The precaution for the Blood of Christ is to sip it with love.

People's lives depend on this covenant between humankind and divine love. Our challenge as liturgical ministers is to reflect more deeply on what this covenant means to the lives of our poor. There is nothing precious about human aches, the starvation of our children, and the neglect of our elders. On this Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, we have another opportunity to be in tune with divine integrity toward all God's beloved people. We become the love we desire in simple wine, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. ♦

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